

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CONFERENCE.

finally been adopted by the Government, another Bill drafted mainly on the lines of the recommendations. As I say, it is only a Bill, and I think the suggestion has been made that we should deal with them. I do not know whether there are any recommendations from the Imperial Government, or from any commission that has sat in England, but those recommendations that have been made, and I think we will probably even have to discuss the minority recommendations of that report. I think it will, however, be a wise thing to take general principles in those recommendations and not details in the first instance. It would be impossible to take these recommendations in detail. That being so, we may very much shorten the time of the Conference, and for myself I may say I cannot see why it should take as long as some people have prophesied it would. I suppose we are all wishing to curtail and save time; we have not come all this distance to talk, we have come to work and to act, and to get others to do the same, if they will, without undue curtailment. But under those conditions, and with those views, I certainly think we will get through our work much quicker than was intended. I was just now on the point of saying that I almost regretted hearing a few words that fell from the President when he said that the Assent to the New Zealand Act was on the understanding that it should be considered at this Conference. Now, I have all the documents that have been passed, and I have not seen anything which leads me to that conclusion. I may have missed it, but the New Zealand Act has advanced almost, not quite, almost to what Australia wants. We want a little more, and I am pleased to have heard, as I knew somewhat before, that Great Britain has advanced very considerably, more considerably than we could have expected, perhaps, in such a short time. As the President said, she moves slowly, but considering that we have the New Zealand Act assented to, and when we have your advance in legislation in Great Britain, I hope we shall get our proposals advanced as far as the Commonwealth is concerned, and although I do not wish here to go into details sitting in the presence of men who know more of these questions, being shipowners, than I can possibly know, I, as a rule, can only speak of general principles, but the remarks made by Sir Joseph Ward as to the bills of lading have been brought under my notice also, and I will give you just a little incident where a case or two of oranges were sent to Fremantle from some particular part, and the crew, I suppose it was, exercised some sort of right and threw the oranges over, and the empty cases were placed upon the wharf and the agents were called upon to pay the freight for the oranges. They had it taken into Court, and when they got into Court their bill of lading caused a verdict to be found against them, and they had to pay for what they never got. I am referring to the remarks made by Sir Joseph Ward to show that in cases such as that I think the shipowner exercises, or the shipping law gives him the power to exercise, rights that may be very unfairly applied.

THE CHAIRMAN: That is one of the instances which will be discussed.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: I do not wish to detain you at any great length, but I feel I must again thank you and thank the Imperial Government for the kindness of their expressions regarding the Commonwealth of Australia, and I speak on behalf of my Colony.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: Will you allow me for one moment, sir, with regard to the New Zealand Shipping Act. I do not want to have any misunderstanding from the point of view of New Zealand. The assent to that Act was delayed for two years; it was a subject of correspondence between the New Zealand Government and the British Government. The delay was owing to some objections raised by British shipowners, but the assent was finally given and it was not a conditional assent. In the despatch the remark made was that the matter would be a subject of discussion afterwards. I want to make it quite clear that the New Zealand Government would not under any conditions have agreed to a conditional assent that its Parliament was not advised of. There is no such thing as a conditional assent.

THE CHAIRMAN: I did not put it like that.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: I want to make it clear that that is not the position. I do not want perhaps later on in the discussion to find it stated that it was a conditional Act.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: The assent was not given upon any understanding.

MR. H. BERTRAM COX: Oh, certainly not.

THE CHAIRMAN: Perhaps we had better discuss now the question of the adjournment. I understand from the representatives of New Zealand and Sir William Lyne that they are very anxious to meet next week. Might we meet on Friday next week? We cannot do very much this afternoon, but still we may clear the ground a little.

SIR JOSEPH WARD: I do not want to be responsible for anybody else's business, but I cannot meet here after the 11th.

THE CHAIRMAN: Can you be here on the 11th?

SIR JOSEPH WARD: Yes, in the morning.

THE CHAIRMAN: Supposing we make it Thursday the 4th.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: If we only are to meet on Wednesday week, that will only give us seven clear days before the Imperial Conference meets, and in those seven days we have to consider 500 or 600 subsidiary clauses to a Bill, some of them of great importance.

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: I do not think we can settle Bills.

THE CHAIRMAN: I do not think we can go beyond settling principles. I do not want to anticipate difficulties, but I do not think we can go beyond settling general principles. Now, what about the 4th—Thursday?

SIR WILLIAM LYNE: Very well.

THE CHAIRMAN: What about the time? 11 o'clock—does that suit everybody? Very well, we will say 11 o'clock.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: Would it facilitate matters at all? A suggestion was made as to what the powers of the respective Colonial Governments are, and the extent to which they could exercise these powers—the expediency of that might be a matter that would come up—might we take it first?

THE CHAIRMAN: I thought of taking the coasting trade first. I would not raise constitutional issues if I could possibly avoid it. I do not think it is necessary; they are always very awkward questions. I might call the Attorney-General here, but I think it is better not, if we can possibly avoid it. I would rather deal, if the Colonial delegates do not mind, with the matter as a practical question which we can adjust. I think, on the whole, we had better keep clear of these questions, if we can.

HON. W. M. HUGHES: Having the power does not imply it is exercised.

THE CHAIRMAN: One does not want to raise these questions if we can avoid them. The Imperial Government would rather not; we prefer discussing it on the basis that you are fully within your rights. Well, now, if we have disposed of that question, shall we go on to the question of the Press, what communications shall be sent to the Press. It is important for you, gentlemen from the Colonies, as it is for us.

MR. BELCHER: With regard to this subject, I think it would be best to leave it to the discretion of no committee of a Conference of this description, where interests are, to some extent, very conflicting, to draw up the matter for the Press. I would suggest that the Hansard staff, or some of the Hansard staff, who are trustworthy—which, I believe, they all are—should be admitted here to this Conference, and they should give, from a professional point of view, as reporters, a fair résumé of what has transpired during the different days. I think that would be the better plan.

THE CHAIRMAN: May I say about that, I do think it will prejudice business if there is anything in the nature of a debate which is reported in the Press. I think it would be infinitely better if we had a conversation rather than a debate. Well, Hansards are not good at reporting conversations, and therefore I think it will be better that you should have a small, rather than a full report, of all the proceedings; that will be conducive to business.